Speech March 3 2011

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Good morning, my name is Janice Smolinski, from Cheshire, Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee on the importance of mandating the way law enforcement and medical examiners respond to investigations into missing persons, and the unidentified dead.

Statistics can be overwhelming.

Strange names for databases can be distracting.

But I'm going to ask the committee today to consider these numbers.

Right now in America there are 160,000 missing people.

Right now in America there are 60,000 unidentified human remains being stored by coroners and medical examiners.

One of the leading homicide investigators in the world, Bill Hagmaier, has publicly stated that a majority of the missing people have been murdered, their bodies scattered in swamps, roadside ditches, and buried beneath moss and branches deep in our forests.

If thousands missing individuals are now lying in morgues as John and Jane Doe, the only way to identify these people is with DNA samples. The samples must be collected and uploaded by medical examiners into a national data bank. Those samples will be compared to DNA samples collected by law enforcement officers while conducting missing person investigations.

A computerized scan of the two DNA samples will seek matches from the missing and the unidentified dead. This is happening all across America, yet the law enforcement

community and the medical examiner in Connecticut resist their mandatory participation in the program.

Most law enforcement officers in Connecticut have not received adequate training in the collection of DNA samples, and they are not properly trained in how to access the national data banks to input the DNA reference samples.

Technology has exploded in the past 15 years and the training of police officers in Connecticut is lagging years behind the science.

Imagine the entire city of Bridgeport vanishes off the face of the earth. Then imagine 60,000 unidentified dead are found on the coast of Stonington, the woods of Andover, the swamps of East Lyme, and in every marsh and meadow in Connecticut.

Could we identify those unnamed dead? Not with the system we currently have in Connecticut. It's too random, too dependent on the initiative a caring and compassionate police officer.

By mandating the changes spelled out in bill 6963, the state of Connecticut will join Florida, New Jersey and Oregon as leaders in solving this national crisis.

At this very second there are 700 people missing in the state of Connecticut, and nowhere is that information centralized and shared with law enforcement and medical examiners. We have no clearinghouse. A person goes missing in Waterbury and that information doesn't make it onto the state police website. Police officers in New London and Greenwich would have no idea, either.

This has to change.

Power is reluctant to admit it's flaws, and the Police Chief's Association spoke out against this bill two years ago. West Hartford police Chief James Strallacci testified before the judiciary committee that we didn't have a problem here in Connecticut. Less that two months later there was a missing teenage girl found imprisoned in a basement in West Hartford. The 15-year-old girl had been missing from Bloomfield for nearly a year, and was found imprisoned, ironically, in Chief Strillacci's town.

It is time for law enforcement to accept the fact that this isn't a West Hartford problem, a Waterbury problem or a Connecticut problem, this is a national crisis.

Bill 6563 is an important step to closing the vast divide between law enforcement, medical examiners, and public trust.

In closing I would like to say that I never imagined in my wildest imagination I would ever be sitting in front of a legislative committee testifying about missing persons and the need to mandate training for police officers in Connecticut.

But then again, I never imagined my 31-year-old son, Billy Smolinski, would go missing in August 2004. Everything that could go wrong in his investigation went wrong. The local police did not treat the case seriously, lost seven individual DNA samples and had no idea a national data bank even existed.

It was a perfect storm of inadequate training and incompetence, and led me to champion mandatory changes in the way police officers handle missing person cases.

My husband Bill and I may never find out what happened to our son five years ago, but we are committed to making

sure that no family in Connecticut has to suffer the pain we are enduring, a pain which is directly linked to inadequate police training.

The gap between science and procedure can only be closed by mandatory training, and I pray that the committee has the strength to look past police objections and do the right thing for the people of Connecticut.